

SEA OTTER CLASSIC

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SPOKESPEOPLE FOR THE SEA OTTER CLASSIC WILL NOW TAKE YOUR QUESTIONS

Monterey, Calif. (Feb. 25, 2009) – The Sea Otter Classic, a four-day celebration of sport, has announced a star-studded list of spokespeople who have seen the event grow over many years, competed in many of its different races, and worked the Expo.

Kelly Benjamin (Colavita/Sutter Home presented by Cooking Light): Top Sprinter

Kelly Benjamin, of Portland, Oregon, became a cyclist by accident, trying it as a fun alternative to running after being sidelined by knee injuries. She very quickly became a successful sprint specialist, demonstrating the technical skills to maneuver tight, fast turns and the power to fight for the win in a pack sprint. The Sea Otter circuit race is one of Kelly's favorite races of the entire season.

"The enclosed racetrack makes it such a fun and unique course, one that really tests riders' abilities," she said. "You can't just be a good climber. You have to be able to handle your bike around sweeping turns at very high speeds."

Not surprisingly, Kelly excels at criterium racing, because she loves fast, technical courses—the more tight turns, the better. In 2008, after earning over 10 victories and podium spots on the NRC circuit, Kelly won the overall USA CRITS championship. She is excited for four solid days of great racing at Sea Otter, including the new criterium race.

"No one will be drawing on previous experience in the criterium," she pointed out. "That makes it all the more fun for both racers, who need to be on their best game, and spectators, who will see that much more action and drama."

Manuel Prado (Team Sho-Air): Cross-country Champion

Stories abound about bike racers getting the start to their careers while living out of a car, eating ramen noodles and taking odd jobs to make ends meet. Costa Rican Manuel Prado started with even less, taking a \$65-per-week



Kelly Benjamin

Photo Credit: Susan Pizzo



Manuel Prado

intrigued him. Prado has now raced and finished "La Ruta" five times, placing 5th in 2008.

He also dreamed of racing at the Sea Otter Classic.

"Since I started riding and racing, I've heard about the world-class field and high level of competition at Sea Otter," said Prado, who speaks fluent English and Spanish. "I knew I had to try it. In fact, it was all I thought it would be, and more. It was 'huge' - the crowds watching us race, the people lining up on the course. It was a big deal for me as a racer."

Prado is driven by his determination and competitive spirit. When he bonked (ran out of energy) during his first attempt at the Sea Otter cross-country race, he vowed to come back and win before turning pro. And so he did, winning the 2007 race as a semi-pro, and ultimately becoming the California Semi-Pro Champion two years running. Last year, in his first year as a professional, he added 2008 State Champion to his list of titles.

Prado enjoys Sea Otter for the opportunity to talk to young people.

"Over the years, some people took the time to teach me and explain technique and skills, and that meant a lot to me," said Prado. "I try to do the same, now that I am in the position to do so."

Melissa Buhl (Team KHS): Gravity Champion

From the time she was 10 years old, Melissa Buhl of Chandler, Arizona, has been making a name for herself in BMX and mountain bike races around the world. She lobbied the ABA (American Bicycle Association) for a women's class at BMX races, and became the first woman to race in the men's pro class when there wasn't one.

According to Pat Blackburn, Melissa's coach and mentor until she was 17, Melissa pumped life into the sport, raising the level of women's racing with her aggressiveness and courage. You can still hear the admiration in his voice when he describes Melissa's world championship experience at 15 years of age. "On Saturday, she was injured in a BMX race and needed stitches, getting out of the hospital at 2 am. On Sunday, she raced a 26-mile mountain bike race at 6 am



Melissa buhl

Photo Credit: Monique Spaulding

and won. And later that same day, she competed in another BMX race, passing a world champion on the way to her victory."

Melissa has added a number of championship titles to her record, including most recently, U.S. National Dual Slalom Champion, U.S. National Downhill Champion, U.S. National Four Cross Champion, and World Four Cross Champion, all in 2008.

At Sea Otter last year, Melissa claimed the Downhill Winner's jersey and came in second place in Dual Slalom. She looks forward to Sea Otter every year. "Sea Otter is one of my favorite races personally, and it has always been an important race for me professionally," said Buhl, who has been racing there since 1998. "I like it because it mixes the product side of things, and the athletes, racing, and families. This is the race where everyone debuts their products and new sponsors. It is great to do well at this race because it kind of shows how everyone has been training in the off-season." Not content to sit on her laurels, Melissa is studying for the MCATS so that she can go to medical school.

Eric Wallace (Thule): Industry Veteran



Eric Wallace

Eric Wallace, of Seattle, Washington, has been coming to the Sea Otter Classic almost since its inception. He came as an elite amateur athlete before donning a team manager's hat, leading several of the top teams—Volvo/Cannondale, Trek/VW and Maxxis—and best athletes to victory. Today Eric works for Thule, a rack company and one of Sea Otter's top sponsors.

Wallace says Sea Otter is absolutely a mainstay on the industry calendar.

"It's been said before, but Sea Otter really is the season kickoff. This is the weekend that everyone has on their calendar, where you see colleagues and competitors from all over the world, show off your new team or new employer, see this year's new equipment and work out the kinks in your bike set-

up. If you start the season without going to Sea Otter, you don't start the season properly."

Eric loves Sea Otter for all the action on the trails and the community it fosters, among cyclists of all backgrounds, racers of all cycling disciplines, and families of all sizes.

"One year, when I was pre-riding the course with the team, we saw a guy pulling a customized stroller carrying his 30-something-year-old son, who had some kind of debilitating disease like MS," remembered Wallace. "I will never forget it. All the guys on the team were teary-eyed talking to him, and I'm teary-eyed now just thinking about it. There was also a whole family on a tandem. That is Sea Otter to me. Anyone can come out and have a good time. It's not all about the bicycles."

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About Sea Otter Classic, Inc.

The 19th Annual Sea Otter Classic will be held April 16-19, 2009 at the Laguna Seca Recreation Area, Monterey, Calif. The four-day "Celebration of Sport" is considered the world's largest cycling festival, hosting nearly 10,000 professional and amateur athletes and 50,000 fans. More information can be found at www.seaotterclassic.com or by calling 800-218-8411.

An online version of this release can be viewed [here](#)

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